

SOME PROBLEMS OF POPULATION*

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I PROPOSE to describe briefly the work of the two committees which the *Eugenics Society* is assisting to finance, namely the Population Investigation Committee and the Population Policies Committee. The first is purely scientific ; it aims at ascertaining the facts and analyzing them. The second is intended to review the facts, and where problems are found to exist, to suggest policies to deal with the problems disclosed. These two committees are complementary to one another, the first being fact-finding and the other policy-making.

Population Investigation Committee

The Population Investigation Committee consists of twenty-two members of whom half are on the committee by virtue of their special knowledge of population problems ; the remainder, all of whom also have special knowledge of this field, represent other organizations. The *Eugenics Society* has three representatives, Lord Horder, Mrs. Hubback and Mr. Julian Huxley. The remaining eight societies have one representative each, and Dr. Blacker is the honorary secretary. All the funds which have been contributed from various sources to this committee, with the exception of £20 a year which is devoted to salaries, go entirely to research. The *Eugenics Society* provides the room for secretarial work free and the London School of Economics provides free accommodation for research workers.

The Committee has done a great deal of work in obtaining improvement in the system of registration of births, marriages and deaths. Other persons and other bodies have been influential, but I think this Committee may claim to have put more energy than any other body into this particular objective. We met with most cordial co-operation from the Registrar-General. It was Parliament and the Government whom it was necessary

to convince that reform was necessary. The Population (Statistics) Act, which was passed into law a little more than a year ago, has made provisions under which certain information is collected which was not assembled before. That information will enable us, when it has been published and analyzed, to ascertain the extent of differential fertility. We shall be able to say to what extent any group or class or occupation in this country contributes to the future population. We shall be able to tell as years go by how far such differences as now exist between the classes are increasing or diminishing.

I do not think that there is any greater service this Committee could have rendered to this *Society* and eugenics in general than to have been influential in obtaining this reform. Ever since the days of Sir Francis Galton we, as eugenists, have been interested in differential fertility, but we may fail to realize how little we know about it ; we are apt to rely on birth-rate figures. Much more data is required in order to understand the position. Owing to the operation of this Act we shall come year by year into possession of the necessary data and we shall eventually have really accurate information about this matter.

The Committee is also interested in making the census more useful to people who have our particular problems in view. Once only in the history of the British census, in 1911, particulars were taken which gave information about the size of families in different classes and occupations. That proved to be of the greatest possible interest to us, but that information is quite out of date. Those questions were not asked in 1921 or in 1931 ; we hope to ensure that they are asked once again in 1941, and if we are successful we shall have accomplished something of great importance to eugenics.

The Committee has put in the forefront of its agenda investigations into the situation which governs child-bearing and child-rearing

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in this country to-day. Under that head come numerous projects of which I am only going to mention two. First, the investigation into the cost of education in relation to the size of family. The Committee entrusted this task to Dr. Leybourne about eighteen months ago. Dr. Leybourne is preparing a book which we hope will be published in the autumn. The second investigation, to which I have alluded, comes under the head of child-bearing and child-rearing: the problem of housing in relation to family needs and family size. This is a problem which is bound to be of importance because of the increasing Government activity in all fields of housing in relation to the type of house that is built, whether cottages or flats, in relation to the location of houses as governed by the Housing and Town Planning legislation, and in relation to the number allowed in houses as controlled by the overcrowding legislation. All these Governmental activities in the field of housing have an obvious and direct bearing upon the whole problem of families in this country. We are fortunate in obtaining the services of Dr. Elsas who has begun the investigations which we anticipate will take about two years.

The Population Investigation Committee also considers it of importance to observe and record what is happening in foreign countries. Mr. Glass, the Research Secretary of the Committee, has published a book called *The Struggle for Population*, in which he describes the trend of population in several European countries, and the various efforts made to increase the birth-rate. He is now engaged upon a complete revision of that work, which is likely to appear in the autumn.

I want to dispel what seems to be a common misapprehension. The Committee concerns itself with the trend of population and has in its publications used the calculations of Dr. Enid Charles and others concerning the estimated future population of this country. These publications have met with criticism which takes the form of saying that the Committee has made prophecies about the future population of this country, or has adopted or sponsored other people's prophec-

ies, and that its prophecies have already been proved to be wrong. But the Committee has never prophesied at all and therefore it has not prophesied wrongly. All the Committee has said is that, if the population continues to move at a certain pace, it will be of a certain size in future years. There were two estimates in which the Committee was specially interested, both made by Dr. Enid Charles. One estimate was made on the supposition that the pace on which the population was going in 1933 would continue.

Another calculation was based on the assumption that the pace would continue to drop as it had been dropping for many years. Certain critics point out that, if you take the first estimate, the population is now higher than her figure gives. This is true but Dr. Charles was most careful to say that any effect of migration into or out of the country had not been taken into consideration. If you look at the figure given by Dr. Enid Charles in her first estimate, and the figure estimated by the Registrar-General for the population to-day, you will find that the estimated population to-day is higher than her figure by little more than the amount that the population has gained by immigration. What has been happening since 1933 is that the population has been going at about the same pace so far as births and deaths are concerned. That is a very important fact. It is not impossible that this long continued drop in the size of the family has very nearly reached its end, and that we may have neared the point where the size of the family is becoming stable. But we have not got the data in our possession which would enable us to say whether this is so. If however the Population (Statistics) Act had been on the Statute Book years ago we should already have the information necessary to decide this point.

Population Policies Committee

The Population Policies Committee is a joint enterprise with the P.E.P., which is short for Political and Economic Planning. They have published many interesting reports on the Press, on the social services,

on housing and so on, but this is the first time they have co-operated with any other body or society. This joint committee aims at producing a report on population policies. It will take into account both the quality and quantity of the population; it is not interested merely in quantitative considerations. It will consider the qualitative as well as the quantitative aspects in order to arrive at a coherent social policy which aims at a population adequate in quality and quantity. This Committee will have to turn its attention to the practical policies which might be put into operation to-day, and they cover the whole field of social effort, the question of Income Tax and its relation to family, possible family allowances, housing, types of housing, whether in town, country and so on; indeed the whole question of the social services comes under review by such a Committee. It is to be hoped that it will have concrete proposals ready by the time when the public will be interested in the population problem.

Consideration of the work of these two Committees leads me to a final reflection on the position of the eugenic movement, its past history, present position and future prospects. The eugenic movement began because Sir Francis Galton and others had a profound belief in the importance of heredity, both for individuals and for society. That belief has proved to be well founded. Before the War very few persons

had any suspicion that heredity might play a part in producing the evils that had attracted their attention and which they wished to abolish. They had not rejected the notion; it was that the idea had not reached them. To-day there are few people who have not heard of eugenics and the possible and probable part played by heredity in most social evils. Nevertheless when the *Eugenics Society* has tried to put forward measures of eugenic nature, it has found it very difficult to gain support for them, because only immediate practical problems engage the attention of political parties. But when the population of this country begins to decline, as it undoubtedly will before long (the date cannot be foretold, largely because we cannot even guess at the amount of immigration into the country, or movement out of it), there will be great public concern. Population will then become an issue of the moment, and measures will be demanded to deal with the situation. There will be a great opportunity for eugenics, an opportunity to insert eugenic considerations into any measures that will be taken for dealing with the quantity of population. The time has not quite come, but it is appropriate to begin now considering the measures that could be taken when public interest is aroused. That precisely is what the Population Policies Committee is attempting to do; before the public is ready it is attempting to get a programme together.

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